

Since an object is necessary for a delusion to become manifest, we can prevent the seeds from awakening into the active form of the delusions by avoiding the objects that activate them. We can try to intentionally avoid the situations that give rise to particular delusions.

This is of course only a temporary –even if effective – measure to reduce delusions which becomes unnecessary once we are able to completely eliminate delusions and their seeds upon the cultivation of the wisdom that directly realizes the ultimate nature of phenomena.

3. *Distractions*

Here distractions refer to worldly social activities that naturally contribute to the generation and increase of delusions. Those activities include activities such as gambling, drinking, taking drugs, endless partying, and engaging in other frivolous activities. They agitate and distract the mind and are extremely detrimental to any kind of spiritual practice.

Unless we have some understanding of selflessness our spiritual resolve is easily swayed by external distractions.

Therefore, monks, nuns, and lay practitioners take vows that help them to avoid those distractions. Monks and nuns live in monasteries or nunneries which in Tibetan are called *gompa*. The word *gompa* literally means "a place of solitude". A place of solitude is a place that is free from the external influence of worldly distractions.

4. *(Mistaken) explanations*

Another cause of delusions is mistaken explanations. Here mistaken explanations refer to adverse teachings, harmful books, movies, video games and so forth that are in opposition to reality and encourage and stimulate us to engage in non-virtuous actions.

5. *Habituation*

Here habituation refers to becoming accustomed to delusions. Those negative habits are formed by allowing delusions to arise and abide for a long time without applying their antidotes. This strengthens their destructive nature and their ability to induce other non-virtuous actions of body, speech, and mind. If we allow, for instance, anger to arise in our continuum and do not try to stop it by applying the antidotes of love and patience we leave powerful imprints, in the form of negative tendencies or habits, in our mental continuum that cause us to constantly get angry despite little provocation.

6. *(Wrong) mental engagement*

Here wrong mental engagement refers to wrong conception, i.e. to erroneously imputing characteristics onto phenomena that they do not possess. For instance, misperceiving objects of attachment in four ways: (1) apprehending that which is impermanent as being permanent, (2) that which is in the nature of suffering as being in the nature of happiness, (3) that which is impure as being pure, and (4) that which is selfless as possessing a self.

Other examples of wrong mental engagement are the wrong conceptions that arise when feeling angry towards an object. As explained before, anger exaggerates the negative qualities of its object or superimposes negative qualities that the object does not possess. Furthermore, there is the misperception that perceives the object of anger to be permanent and the misperception that perceives the object of anger to possess a self.

Karma

English: (volitional) action / karma

Tibetan: ལས། *Lae*

Following the explanation of delusions is the explanation of contaminated karma which is the other main cause or origin of the truth of suffering.

Karma is a very profound topic and extremely difficult to comprehend in all its complexity. In general, karma refers to volitional or intentional physical, verbal, and mental actions. Those actions are the causes of the variety of our pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral experiences. Pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral experiences correspond to beneficial, harmful, and neutral volitional actions respectively.

Therefore, it is important that not everything is the result of karma. For instance, the fact that compounded phenomena are impermanent, that we have a mind etc. are not the results of karmic actions.

For a karmic action to be complete three factors are needed: (1) intention, (2) the actual action, and (3) satisfaction.

Intention is the most important factor, for it induces the latter two factors and determines whether the action is positive, negative, or neutral. It is important to understand that intention here does not merely refer to the coarse kind of intention we are aware of but also to the unconscious, instinctive, and spontaneous drive that directs our actions.

The actual action refers to physical, verbal, and mental actions motivated by intention. Satisfaction constitutes the conclusion, for it refers to the feeling of satisfaction, or even joy, upon the completion of the action.

We have accumulated countless different karmas and an infinite number of karmic imprints are placed on our mental continuum ready to ripen when the appropriate causes and conditions assemble.

Therefore it is important to understand that our experiences are not merely dependent on one cause.

Quite often when we encounter a situation, particularly a problem, we blame only a single cause.

However, there are always numerous conditions involved in creating the situation – the external causes and conditions as well as the ripening of the internal karmic imprints.

Furthermore, every moment of our life we accumulate new karmic actions of body, speech, and mind that possess the potential to form our future experiences.

Therefore, only an omniscient Buddha is able to understand Karma's full implications. However, knowing the basic characteristics and functions of karma can have a profound effect on our life and is essential in comprehending the second noble truth.

Moreover, there are two major benefits one derives from reflecting on the general working of karma. The first benefit is that when we encounter problems and difficulties we will learn not to blame them on others. We will be able to accept those as the results of our own previous actions and in fact, be able to feel joyful that the previously accumulated karma has now yielded its result and is hence unable to ripen in suffering again.

The second benefit is that having recognized that meeting difficult circumstances is the result of our past actions we will learn not to generate more negative future karma by getting angry at others for causing us problems. Instead we will make a serious effort to avoid repeating the actions that cause us to experience the suffering we experience now.

Even though karma actually refers to the cause of our experiences, the term is also often used to describe the result of our karma. When the term karma is used to describe a karmic result (e.g. saying that the experience of an unpleasant feeling is my karma), we give the name of the cause (karma) to the result (the karmic result of experiencing an unpleasant feeling). This is similar to saying that our room gets a lot of sun when the rays of the sun enter our room. The rays of the sun are the result of the sun and thus we give the name of the cause (the sun) to the effect (the sun rays).

The basic characteristics and functions of karma are extensively explained in Lama Tsongkhapa's ***Lam Rim Chenmo (Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment)*** during the exposition on the attitude of a person of smaller capacity and during the exposition on the attitude of a person of medium capacity.

Here, in order to get a good understanding of the second noble truths some of the characteristics and functions of karma will be explained:

In general, the way to reflect on karma entails four points:

- 1) The certainty of karma
- 2) The magnification of karma
- 3) One does not experience the result of an action one has not accumulated
- 4) Actions one has accumulated do not perish

1) The certainty of karma

Tibetan: ལས་ངེས་པའི་ཚུལ། - *Lae nge-pa'i tsuel* (*Lae* = [volitional] action/karma, *nge pa* = certainty/certain/determined, *tsuel* = mode/way/manner)

The ***Transmission of the Vinaya*** says:

Whatever karma is produced will bring a corresponding result.

This means that the result of a virtuous action can only be pleasant whereas the result of a non-virtuous action can only be unpleasant. Likewise, any pleasant feeling can only be the result of a positive action whereas any unpleasant feeling can only be the result of a negative action. Even the slightest inconsistency in this natural process is impossible.